

TITLE: More PAR Bloopers

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~~Confidential~~*Language abuse*

More PAR Bloopers

Carol Willett

(b)(3)(c)

From time to time the challenge of crafting timely, accurate, and persuasive performance appraisal reports (PAR) strains the skills of the most dedicated and thoughtful manager. The malapropisms, creative misspellings, and mixed metaphors that occasionally result cause both confusion and amusement in centralized Directorate of Operations (DO) evaluation and promotion panels. The following excerpts, selected by 1993 panels, illustrate why English is often cited as a difficult language. Excerpts are grouped according to the panel response they elicited. Our observations are in parentheses:

I Beg Your Pardon?

“X accompanies a majority of meetings the rater attends....” (Does X play banjo or piano when accompanying?)

“We cannot miss a beat in this office.” (It throws off the aforementioned banjo player.)

“Complimentary to his employee grooming....” (Nothing like making sure that your employees are well coifed, and well complemented.)

“She immediately tightened her belt and effectively performed her duties and those of her subordinates.” (A Special Achievement Award for a two-for-one-blooper sentence.)

“X is competent in the completion of memoranda responsive to requests when the results are negative and those which are so vague that it is impossible to conduct a reasonable search.” (Translation: “Sorry, we have no idea what you want.”)

The initial article on this subject, “Writing Below PAR,” appeared in the fall 1991 edition of *Studies in Intelligence*.

“...tomorrow is often a luxury.” (Don’t tell the IRS. They’ll try to tax it.)

“...during the terrible rotational cycle of 1992....” (Right up there with the blizzard of ‘88, the flood of ‘93, and the Mets of ‘62.)

“The fire in the gut has not always been obvious.” (Another satisfied Maalox customer.)

I Don’t Think That Word Means What You Think It Means

“His erstwhile contribution and participation is expected to continue.” (Le mot juste.)

“She possesses good intrapersonal skills.” (Talks to herself; gets polite answers.)

“X tackles new assignments willingly.” (OK, X, you rush the quarterback; I’ll cover the receivers.)

“One of subject’s most attributable assets....” (The employee’s other assets are not his own.)

(b)(1)
(b)(3)(n)

“X has demonstrated the capability to perform complex tasks in a qualitative manner.” (Written by an economist!)

“Can be called upon on a real-time basis.” (Comes when called.)

“X worked concomitantly with OGC....” (The only way to work with OGC.)

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"Subject prepared poignant talking points." (Tell your asset her eyes are like limpid pools.)

"...has an uncanny precognitive response." (Like a preventive reaction strike?)

Is This a Biological Thing?

"Due to his height, this man should probably be directed along liaison lines or staffwork." (Over 6 feet or under 4 feet?)

"He involves himself athletically in Base and local activities." (Physical conditioning is a must.)

"All said and done, Subject is human." (What a relief! We thought he might be an alien.)

"He needs to get the operational chrysalis out of the political cocoon it is in." (A tricky metamorphosis.)

"He is endowed with a certain lethal gentleness." (And she has a certain gentle lethality?)

"He supervises one part-time wife." (If the service had wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.)

"He has a numbleness of mind and spirit." (He can imagine jumping over a candle?)

"He needs to develop a sense of looking more at the horizon at the front than checking back to see how well he is covered to the rear." (Sounds like this one has executive potential.)

Yes, But What Did They Actually Do?

"X demonstrated an extraordinarily high learning curve." (Did he go ballistic?)

"Subject encouraged and enjoyed a steady stream of visitors to her office, including political officers, DEA officers, military attachés, visiting analysts, and lesser mortals." (Such as? Oh, well, at least she enjoyed them.)

"She has served in a position of furnishing continuous continuity to this base." (Without a break?)

"Subject projects the image of a highly intelligent and professional officer." (Isn't, but projects a great image.)

"Policymakers were indeed literally hanging on her very words, creating constant, extreme pressures." (Hanging is, after all, a capital punishment.)

"One of X's main attributes is that she has the self-confidence to question herself." (Self-debriefing, a great party trick.)

"The highest compliment that can be paid to X...was that after her departure...the desk was ably handled by a CT." (OK, what's the second highest?)

"He must keep his eye on the importance of constantly turning over rocks, examining what might be worthwhile underneath and, if there's not much, replacing the rock and moving to the next one. He must learn to be an efficient hunter." (And the rater an efficient writer.)

More Food Metaphors?

"Eager to gain additional knowledge and experience, X consumed every piece of information shared by Y." (Thereby providing food for thought?)

"Managers and employees were starving for her expertise." (Let's get her together with the previous employee and start a food fight.)

"Subject suffers from intellectual malnutrition." (A loser in the last food fight.)

"Can cut through garbage, get to the meat." (Never accept a dinner invitation from this officer.)

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Headquarters Versus the Field

"X, who characterizes himself as 'not having a natural warmth for people' and as 'having difficulty communicating,' has a realistic and effective way of conveying his concepts." (In other words, X knows he's a jerk, you know he's a jerk, and he tells you anyway.)

"One recent returnee, a senior officer fresh from several days of Headquarters briefings, commented that Subject's briefing was the only substantive conversation he'd had since returning to Headquarters." (Don't complain, buddy. Imagine what it's like to work with these people every day!)

"The Headquarters-Field relationship is the lifeblood of the DO and Subject's role in the program was the oxygen that provided the fuel and energy." (Calling Dr. Kildare.)

"...not just another Headquarters Department of Obfuscation...." (But THE Headquarters Department of Obfuscation.)

Cliche Count!

"...no noticeable weaknesses." (Or has kept them hidden so far.)

"...tenacity of a bulldog." (Doesn't know when it's time to let go.)

"...fulfills every manager's dream." (Mine is a Ferrari. Can this employee get me one?)

"...without belaboring a cliche...." (Don't worry, it's already been done.)

"Proverbial quick study." (Call Aesop! I can't remember that proverb!)

English is a Difficult Language!

"X is able to identify problems and successfully complete them in its entirety." (Did the writer lose interest in the sentence?)

"...imminently capable of providing this important function." (Eminently, too.)

"X has done an excellent good job." (Not just fair to middling, mind you.)

"...exceptionally unique." (Writer is taking PAR-writing lessons from the previous rater.)

"...a very important necessity." (Glad to see we have another student in that class.)

"It was immediately clear when foreign hands were found in the World Trade Center bombing...." (Must have been messy.)

"...demonstrated unmitigated excellence...." (The rest have been mitigating their excellence, and I want it stopped, pronto!)

"...showed excellent understanding of the English-language." (Glad somebody here does. But what's that hyphen for?)

"X found his self alone." (Without no help?)

"Seldom has such a large accomplishment fit into a single PAR paragraph." (For my next writing trick....)

"I'll-do-as-I'm-told-so-I-can-get-back-overseas trap." (Winner of the adjective of the year award, but don't let this rater near any more hyphens.)

Metaphorically Speaking

"...provided oral briefs...." (I prefer Haynes.)

"...quintessential diamond in the rough...." (Translation: hard to work with.)

"...making sure that the release of DO information does not result in an unmanageable mosaic." (Annals of Flowerey Prose, Round I.)

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"He takes more time than most of his peers to travel from Key Building to Headquarters to community facilities...." (Get this guy a horse! A map! Something!)

"...standing astride the divide between ops and analysis and pitching and catching with both hands...." (Quick, call the Orioles!)

"X could squeeze traces out of a rock!" (Concealment devices get more and more clever.)

"X is the spark plug which fires the DCO engine." (On all six cylinders?)

"This PAR is an effort to take the bushel basket away from X's 'light.'" (Words fail us. And failed the rater, too.)

Spell Check!

"...heroine trafficking...." (Low bidder on the spell checker.)

"...cudo...." (...I'll hit him with my thesauru. Kudos is not plural.)

"X has undergone a complete metamorphous...." (Back to caterpillars again.)

"...completed her 3 year trail period...." (Presumably somewhere out in the field.)

"...speedy editorial finalzing...." (Glad she wasn't in a hurry to get it done.)

"...subject's communications abilities...and...technical fine points...." (The gift that keeps on giving.)

"...more felictious in style." (Never met a style problem she couldn't lick.)

"Never requires editing for...grammer/spelling." (Maybe we can still get our money back on the spell checker.)

"Beyond the cope of her assigned duties...." (Such as proofreading?)

"...expresses herself verbally with equal flare and ease." (Quite a flashy speaker.)

Anchors Aweigh!

"X enthusiastically immersed himself...." (Splash! Cat S overboard!)

"...pulling her oar...." (A failed attempt to rescue the person above.)

"She has sailed uncharted waters in a nontraditional boat without hitting any rocks." (Woman on board!)

"...was thrown in at the deep end and performed swimmingly." ("There's a whale in the bathtub," said Tom superficially.)

"X dived in with both feet." (Straight 6s work on PARs here, but not at the Olympics.)

"...showed persistence and tack." (By fishing in troubled waters.)

What Is Going On Here?

"You are welcome to rotate with us any time." (We go around in bureaucratic circles.)

"X is the third or fourth largest DO station in the world." (Depending upon whether everyone shows up for work on the day we count noses.)

"X had the misfortune of arriving at perhaps the worst period in station's history: its physical destruction." (Of course, there was that one really bad hair day last week.)

"I was impressed, several months ago, with how quickly X understood what I was saying at a briefing." (I mumble a lot.)

"She followed the instructions perfectly, as I knew she would—except for the yelling." (She's still learning to yell.)

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“...she has spread her mantle of efficiency over him as well.” (Leaving us all gasping for air.)

“This individual was assassinated before Subject's ops initiatives could be implemented.” (If only Subject had met her deadline with that target study!)

“Subject is also very thorough in the execution.” (Just tell that to the officer above!)

“...extensive network of contacts within the outside of the Directorate....” (Is this person going up the down staircase?)

“...with...development...of a unilateral surveillance team running close behind.” (The team is training for the Olympics.)

“Laziness and greed began to pose handling problems.” (Another great vaudeville team.)

“She takes the time to proofread her work and the results show.” (Whiteout all over the page.)

“A CT...who sincerely thought a sanitized memo has to be first boiled to remove fingerprints.” (We do that only to get the whiteout off.)

Math Check!

“X ran 264 traces, three times more than the 145 she ran last year.” (OK, if I have three apples and give you one...)

“The newly formed 9-person X branch...tripled in size...at one point numbering 23 people” (Must be new math.)

“...On 38 occasions, X displayed a high degree of tact and diplomacy.” (As for the other 98,239 occasions...)

“Although X is only 11 days past the 120 day rule for writing a PAR, it is my pleasure to report that her performance has continued in the same manner as reported in her previous PAR.” (Sets a standard by which all nonsequiturs will be evaluated.)

“...numerous experts in the cue....” (Sounds like a job for a mathematician.)

Call the IG.

“...exercising an increasingly firm grip on her IS-3 reports secretary.” (You're choking me!)

“...(our office) recognized his talents and capabilities by awarding him several EPAs. While these are awarded on a fairly regular basis throughout the DO....” (Hey, it keeps him happy...)

“Ms. Subject's....” (well, it may be politically correct.)

“Mr. Subject.” (Apparently the spouse/brother of Ms. Subject.)

Please, Don't Say It Again!

“Which brings me to a point that I simply cannot over-emphasize.” (But watch me. These are not idle words.)

“As I have stated over and over, but feel it is worth repeating....” (Would you mind saying that again?)

“...leaving me with little to add.” (The reviewer then went on for 1 1/2 pages.)

“She exhibits no weaknesses which require improvement.” (They're strong weaknesses in their own right.)

Pointing Out the Obvious

“...her job changed and evolved during her tour.” (Evolution without change. What a concept!)

“For the record, in this Rater's 31 years with the Agency as a Category B officer, he has written only three overall 7 PARs.” (This was not one of them, but thanks for setting the record straight.)

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Bloopers

"Tedious it is, but it is the only way." (The Tao of Tedium.)

"She has the potential to be rated higher, depending upon her future performance." (How do YOU spell "tautology"?)

"...on arrival here, X's duties were new to him."
(A surprise party? You shouldn't have!)

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